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U.S. Still Divided On Viet-Nam Aims

CPYRGHT Stanley Karnow

SAIGON— we are no longer the tail on Madame Nhu's kite," said a leading American diplomat in Saigon, and backing up such blunt metaphors with action, the U.S. is trying to disengage itself from identity with President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime. Since he arrived here last August, the American Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, has made no secret of his aim to be tough with Diem. He has asked the President to jettison his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, whose secret police activities have given South Viet-Nam's Government more the appearance of a tyranny than a dictatorship. He has also criticized Madame Nhu for her outspoken attacks on American soldiers.

Most significantly, however, the U.S. has curtailed its aid by stopping the \$10 million monthly commercial import program. Under this program, commodities such as fuel and food are imported and sold on the local market to provide currency to pay the Vietnamese Army.

American officials are apparently divided in their views of what U.S. pressures can accomplish. Some believe that it may be possible to reform the Diem government. Others hope that it can be toppled by a non-Communist opposition that could create more effective leadership. Responding to American pressure, Mr. Nao, in recent talks with journalists and visitors, has accused the U.S. of "betrayal" and "destroying the psychology of that country." He has attacked Americans for "initiating a process of disintegration" and declared that the Vietnamese "have lost confidence in the United States." Last week he told one foreign guest that Ambassador Lodge was "a man of no morality."

MR. NHU frankly says that he wants American aid without the American presence in Viet-Nam. "I want money, arms and equipment, and we will win the war ourselves," he said. "Without the Americans we can win in two or three years. If they remain God knows how long, it will take." Both Diem and Nhu tend to become nebulous when asked if Viet-Nam has any alternative to American support. Diem has lately taken advantage of the advantages of what he calls the "third world"—a bloc he has described as including General de Gaulle and Mr. Nehru.

At the same time, Nhu seems to suggest the possibility of South Viet-Nam joining a deal with Communist North Viet-Nam. Not long ago he mentioned a meeting with men in Hanoi who are "more nationalist than Communist." When asked about his relations with Ho Chi Minh, he replied that "the Americans have done everything to push me away."

As it may be, the American presence in Viet-Nam is on the decline.

CPYRGHT

regime is extremely difficult. For there seems to be no alternative to the Diem government. A few months ago there were conspirators everywhere who claimed that all they wanted was a modicum of American encouragement and they would rise in revolt. Since then, various such statements have come from Washington and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, with no results.

THE relatively minor trouble with the CIA had its roots in the role played by the American intelligence chief, John Richardson, an extremely able man. Assigned to stay close to the power in Saigon, Richardson became friendly with Nhu. Like several other American officials, he also came to believe that Nhu had desirable leadership qualities. But Richardson was never taken entirely into Nhu's confidence, for he reportedly failed to know in advance that Vietnamese special forces would raid Buddhist temples on Aug. 21. Following that attack, Washington suggested that alternatives be found for the Diem regime. Richardson disagreed with this policy on the grounds that alternatives would not be found, and his assessment was correct.

All this might have remained secret had not Nhu, learning of the attempt against Diem's regime, publicized the plot by "foreign elements." Vietnamese newspapers named Richardson as the leader of the operation, and Washington recalled him. Since then Nhu has revised his appraisal of the CIA. In this whole mess in Viet-Nam there are two scapegoats—me and the CIA," he said recently. "We are both innocent." Such as they were, the divergences between the State Department and CIA now appear to be resolved. But senior American officers in Saigon still do not agree with U.S. diplomats that the regime must be changed to wage war effectively.

Indeed, they are unusually optimistic about the situation. When asked to comment on a recent Washington communiqué that the U.S. mission would be fulfilled by 1965, one high-ranking American officer said that he thought it could be finished "even before then." Asked the same question, an American diplomat said "Let's face the truth—we will be lucky to be out of here in

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